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# The American who loved Iran

THE NAMES of three of the six Americans still being held in Iranian prisons recently have come to light. Of the three, Zia Nassary, an Afghan-born naturalized American citizen working on behalf of Afghan refugees, and Erwin David Rabhan, President Jimmy Carter's former political crony, will undoubtedly attract the bulk of public interest.

However, pondering why the third incarcerated American, Terry Graham, now lies in prison may provide analysts with a greater understanding of the nature of the Iranian Revolution. And perhaps it may give others some insight concerning the difficulties involved in breaking out of the "ugly American" stereotype in developing nations throughout the world.

Graham, whom this writer has known for more than a decade, is truly enamored of Iran, its culture and its people. There are not many like him — people who become so engrossed in another culture that they want nothing more than to be allowed to live in close contact with it.

EVEN AMONG Iranophiles, Graham is a rare individual. He has traveled widely in Asia and Africa, speaks several languages and has held a variety of jobs as a journalist, writer, entertainer and teacher. On coming to Iran, however, he became engrossed by what he called "the sheer spiritual power of the culture." He converted to Islam, making a special pilgrimage to the shrine city of Mashhad to formalize his vows.

Graham speaks fluent Persian, writes the language with a beautiful calligraphic hand and can quote the classic poets with the best. With far less knowledge, others have made successful academic careers for themselves.

But Graham felt he had a higher calling. While writing for English-language newspapers in Tehran for a pitifully small salary, occasionally doing scraps of consulting work for Tehran's pre-revolutionary international television station, he spent his spare hours translating the writings of the founder of a major modern Sufi sect into English for international distribution.

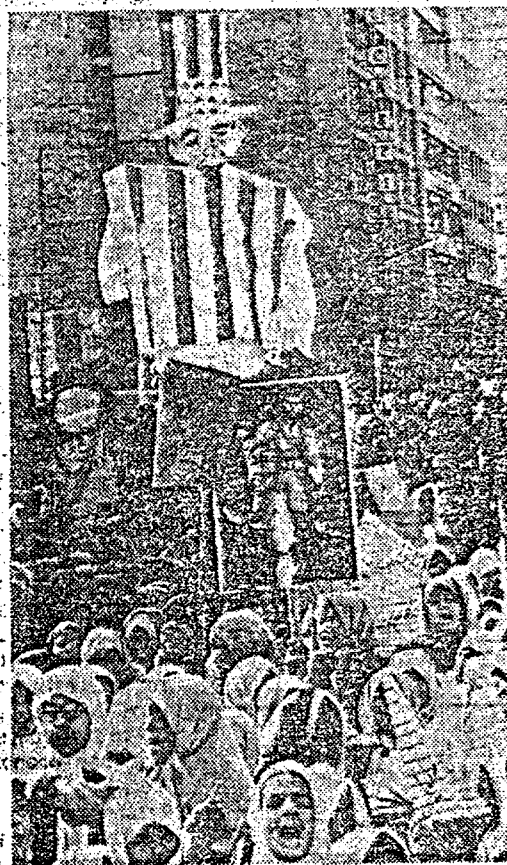
GRAHAM WAS one of the first Americans to come out vocally in support of the Iranian Revolution. He was almost violently outspoken at times concerning the excesses of the shah's regime. When it became clear that Americans were not going to be able to stay in Iran after the resignation of Shapour Bakhtiar, he made a

monumental decision.

Faced with the fact that his visa was due to expire, he declared that he would stay in Iran and become an Iranian citizen.

The plan seemed to work for a while. Those who knew him would hear from time to time that he still was in Tehran, writing or working in some publishing venture. At some point in 1980, however, he dropped out of sight. This probably was when he was arrested.

But it is not difficult to guess why Graham is being detained. He is an embarrassment to a revolutionary regime that preaches daily that the United States hates Iran and its Islamic Revolution, that Americans are interested in only one thing in Iran — economic exploitation.



Anti-American demonstration in Tehran.

Graham, who stands 6 feet, 5 inches and is blond, cannot be hidden. He gave the lie to those statements every time he walked down the street and talked to his grocer. Clearly, there is only one reason from the standpoint of the authorities that he stayed in Iran: He must be a spy. By the logic of the revolution, there is no other conclusion possible.

Undoubtedly, many Americans will find the view of the Iranian authorities eminently plausible: Graham must be a mole. Why else would a red-blooded American boy want to live with the Iranians? The question is worth asking seriously, since it reveals one of the paradoxes of our time in a world where Americans are being pressed more and more to extend themselves into the international sphere — in business, scholarship and international politics.

Sadly, the world has come to expect U.S. citizens to behave as "ugly Americans" wherever they go to live outside of their own land. They are especially expected either to be patronizing or contemptuous of exotic religions and social customs.

Since Americans are thought to be constitutionally unable to accept a foreign culture, one who does manage, like Graham, can only have done so because of ulterior motives. The only category readily available for such a person in many parts of the world is that of CIA agent.

PARENTHETICALLY, the State Department actually seems to punish career officers who develop foreign expertise. Those who understand a culture well enough to interpret it with some accuracy are accused of developing "clientitis" and are quickly quarantined to some other part of the world.

The folly of this policy has been seen too often in recent years.

Thus, Americans seem to be doomed to a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" situation. Behave like a stereotypical American abroad and be thought a pig; assimilate and be thought a spy.

As the U.S. reaches out to the increasingly interdependent world, something will have to be done to improve the situation. It's not nice to be a pig abroad, but it's even less nice to be thrown in jail because the American way of living in foreign lands leaves no other place for people like Terry Graham.

William O. Beeman